

## **PROPOSAL SUMMARY**

The Cluster “Asia and Europe in a Global Context: Shifting Asymmetries in Cultural Flows” will focus on the past and present dynamics of shifting asymmetrical flows between the cultures of Asia and Europe in a global context. Asymmetrical flow is not a defective state that may give way to utopian symmetry, but a pervasive – if shifting – mode of relations between cultures that generates large-scale creative as well as destructive energies. Once perceived, such asymmetry sets off absorbing efforts to rationalise, trivialise, or shift it.

The Cluster challenges a master narrative that posits the permanence of asymmetrically important flows from the “West” into Asia along with its historical explanation, its methodology, and the resulting Eurocentric structures of humanities and social science research. This narrative essentialises culture, fails to account for actual shifts, and disregards large parts of the record. The challenge will benefit from work done by Asian scholars and will actively involve their cooperation. It will make efforts to overcome the research emphasis on the written word with its elite focus and will integrate marginalised sources.

### **Heidelberg assets in Asia- and Europe-related humanities**

The Cluster brings together scholars from a wide range of fields in the humanities that have made significant and internationally acclaimed contributions. The Heidelberg humanities rank first in Germany in the number of scholars having received highest academic honours such as the Leibniz Award or the prize of the International Balzan Foundation with many others being elected members of scientific academies in Germany, Europe, and Asia. As a consequence, the Heidelberg humanities have also been encouragingly successful in acquiring external funding for scholarly work. A particular strength of Heidelberg is in East and South Asian Studies, with the two by far largest and best assorted specialised German institute research libraries in these fields. The South Asia Institute (SAI) with eight professors and the Centre for East Asian Studies (ZO) with seven professors form a unique Asian Studies focus in Germany that enjoys international renown and visibility. In order to validate the historical dimension of asymmetrical global flows, the Cluster integrates the work of these two institutes with that of a group of highly distinguished scholars from the Centre for European History and Culture (ZEGK) and the Centre for Studies of the Ancient World (ZAW).

### **Overcoming dysfunctional structures**

The Cluster’s Principal Investigators have tried to overcome the narrow confines of their fields, which have largely been set during the nineteenth century when national borders, language, and media (text, sound, and image) have been elevated into defining features. The Collaborative Research Centre (SFB) “Dynamics of Ritual”, which brings together a fair number of scholars from Asian and European Studies as well as from studies focused on the ancient Near East and Eastern Mediterranean, was an important step in new forms of long-term and close cooperation within a transcultural perspective. The

evaluation of its work by a DFG committee was exceedingly positive and its continuation for another four years was approved. Many of the scholars involved in this work have joined in the present Cluster application so as to develop and consolidate these positive experiences. It is an effort to institutionalise a structure that overcomes the regional or medial definitions of scholarly fields in the humanities, and moves towards a study of areas that sees them in a global context. In these “globalised area studies” Europe would be one of these areas.

### **The Cluster’s point of departure**

The Cluster proceeds from the self-evident observation that cultural flows between Asia and Europe did so asymmetrically with a predominant West-East flow in the modern period. This flow includes

- a) “Western” *concepts* such as “state”, “health”, “citizen”, “realism”, “movement” or “city” – many of them with important Asian imports in their history. They have made their way through newly created or reconfigured terms first used in translations into the languages of East or South Asia. At the same time some Western terms such as “way/Weg” or “Nicht-ich” have been reconfigured to represent *dao* or *anātman* in translation from Chinese or Sanskrit, not to mention the impact of Asian art and music;
- b) *institutions* such as the “Ministry of Foreign Affairs”, “compulsory schooling”, the “museum”, or, coming from the East, the “public service examination”;
- c) *practices* from the body posture of a “modern girl” holding a cigarette to the rhetorical pose of a political leader and the way to organize a public rally, with vegetarianism, Maoist rhetoric, and Zen meditation going the other way.

These features have often been locally reconfigured to the point that their surface shows no visible link to their origin and that this link has been forgotten. Still, they constitute a powerful – if hardly recognised or studied – common platform for all modern communication and interaction across languages and cultures that consists of translingual concepts, transnational institutions, and transcultural practices. In this way, the “global” is a layer in its own right. It has its own dynamics and is not just the sum of the nation states. It is a worthy object of study that requires both a new methodology and a new way of linking and integrating sources.

Transcultural flows are carried both ways by mediators, namely media such as books, films, or e-mail messages; objects such as the motor vehicle, the wristwatch, penicillin, or fire-crackers; or human beings such as the Tokyo student in Cornell, the Pommeranian missionary in Canton, the Bengali family that has moved to Birmingham, or the Muslim Berbers occupying Spain.

The modern “globalisation” is only the widening and quickening of a process that has gone on since prehistoric times through exchange and migration. Much of the stimulus to explore this new field of research in fact comes from advances in tracing human, plant, animal, and bacterial DNA across the globe and the vast cultural flows and connections these traces suggest. Given the long history of such flows, the Cluster provides a framework for a close interaction between scholars working on earlier developments in Asia and Europe and those dealing with the modern period. The local reconfigura-

tions of cultural imports take place in a particular context with its own historic dimensions and tensions, and never simply reproduce what has come in. To understand the new configurations, a thorough understanding of their historical conditions is essential. The work of the Cluster thus has an important historical dimension.

### **The Cluster's goals**

The Cluster's focus on the past and present dynamics of shifting asymmetrical flows between the cultures of Asia and Europe hopes to achieve five goals:

- a) To introduce asymmetry as a heuristic device in the study of transcultural flows. This focus offers a powerful tool to explore the dynamics of cultural developments under the impact of transnational, transcultural, and global flows in concepts, institutions, and practices, carried by media, objects, or people. On both ends of such flows, deep conflicts are involved in shaping their content, translation, mediation, and processing.
- b) To bring together scholars working on Asia and Europe in research that focuses on actual cultural flows and does not perpetuate old cultural and national essentialisations by just being comparative. It will at the same time overcome the old division of roles with the European as the researcher and the Asian as the object of research by actively involving scholars from Asia in all aspects of the research.
- c) To establish an institutional structure that provides a framework and stability for globalised area studies, including a Centre for Transcultural Studies, and a Joint Committee on Transcultural Studies with five new professorships, and tenure track junior scholars, a structure that will continue after the Cluster's research has run its course.
- d) To contribute to the development of methodologies able to adequately handle the multimedial and multilingual sources involved in the study of transcultural flows. This includes the development of types of transculturally and transmedially linked and tagged resources such as databases without which much of this research will not have a solid grounding.
- e) To provide the research environment for the development and growth of a sizeable group of young researchers who have enjoyed the experience to work in a large cooperative project on transcultural flows, have gained the methodological wherewithal to deal with them, and qualify for academic positions in redesigned scholarly fields.

### **The Research Areas**

To ensure relevancy and feasibility, and to make the best of available competencies and resources, the Cluster has established four Research Areas: Governance and Administration; Public Spheres; Health and Environment; and Historicities and Heritage. They take up key areas of asymmetrical flows, namely those relating to state, society, body, and history or memory, each within a given but diverse, contested and changing cultural context. Within these Research Areas, Research Foci have been defined that group together related research projects pursued by individuals or research groups with

Junior Research Groups given a prominent place. Apart from many overlapping topics, the Research Areas are linked through

- a) their objects of analysis (concepts, institutions, and practices);
- b) their common focus on solving the methodological problems of handling the different media and human agents pushing, pulling, and carrying the cultural flow;
- c) their feeding into and drawing on two newly developed databases (for translingual concepts and transcultural images) that will be essential for the empirical grounding of their work;
- d) five new professorships, all of which focused on linkages between the Research Areas including a special responsibility for the development of the databases:
  - Intellectual History with a focus on translingual concepts
  - Art History with a focus on global flow of art forms
  - Visual and Media Anthropology
  - Buddhist Studies with a focus on the transcultural spread
  - Cultural Economic History with one focus on Asia;
- e) the institutional layer of a Joint Committee on Transcultural Studies that will be the principal home for the new professorships and some of the to-be-tenured junior faculty, and will offer a platform to consolidate and spread the new orientation and substantiate it through new undergraduate, graduate and postgraduate programs.

### **The Research Architecture**

The work of this Cluster presupposes a combination of skills and competencies (in languages, cultures, sources, methods, technologies) no scholar is able to unite in a single person. Even particular studies by an individual scholar in this field will have to rely to an unprecedented degree on the work of others. The Cluster has decided to tackle this problem head-on by setting up an advanced research architecture that will facilitate the particular type of collaborative research to be done here. In this endeavour it will be able to draw on the rich experience of number of database developments for texts, sounds, and images. The Heidelberg Research Architecture will consist of two parts,

- a) Globalised Language Database and Audiovisual Database, i.e. databases on translingual concepts and transcultural images;
- b) a collaborative work environment with a state-of-the-art set of tools for storage, organisation, and retrieval of data; for interaction; for module development; and for reaching out to a wider public with the results.

The development of the content and the architecture of the databases is an integral part of the work of the Research Areas which will also provide the databases with their foci.

### **Collaboration with scholars and institutions from Asia**

The active involvement of scholars from Asia in this Cluster reflects the growing importance and international recognition of contributions from the hands of Asian scholars. This is just the beginning of a sea

change, which is going to profoundly affect all area studies, including the European, and will change the research environment of generations to come. The Cluster will create what we believe will be a normal future research environment by involving scholars to the best of its capacities from Asia in all of its projects. In order to actively search out senior, but especially aspiring young scholars in Asia for cooperation in the Cluster, one outpost each in India and in China will be established in connection with institutions of advanced research in the humanities in these two regions. Operating on the principles of lean management, the Cluster's representatives there will explore the scholarship of South and East Asia, be hosts to conferences, and arrange for research stays of scholars from the Cluster.

In sum, it is our vision that the Cluster will offer a platform for the formation of a generation of young scholars capable of handling area studies from a global perspective.